

The Next Chapter

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Summary: In the aftermath of Reily's death and the down fall of the Scooby Gang, a broken Buffy comes to Angel with a proposition

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She could hear them behind her as she ran. The grunting, howling, screeching sounds of the demons and the evil laughter of the vampires were chasing her. She could smell the rot and death and blood in the air. The bile rose in her throat and she knew she was going to be sick. Her side ached from running and she couldn't breathe. Never in her life had she felt so weak. Never in her life had she felt so merely human. The cold clammy hands were grabbing her, pulling her back. A hundred mouths tore into her flesh, claws ripping her skin from her bones. Then Adam was in front of her. He smiled as he reached in and ripped the fragile life from her womb and swallowed it whole.

That's when Buffy woke up screaming.

"Buffy! Buffy?!?" Reily was shaking her, shouting at her, then pulling her close. "Buffy, it was just a nightmare. A nightmare. Buffy you are okay. You're safe!"

"Oh God Reily, oh God!" She focused on his face. Then she felt that feeling come back and bolted for the bathroom. Reily held her head as she vomited. Then he held her body as she sobbed into his shoulder. When she had cried herself to sleep he tucked her into bed, pulled on his jeans and went to see Giles.

"The nightmares are getting worse. She's not sleeping enough. She won't eat. What she eats doesn't stay down. When she goes out on patrol she comes back a walking bruise. How much longer can we do this?" Reily shoved his hands in his pockets as he paced back and

forth. Giles shook his head.

"You are sure she's pregnant?" Giles asked, hoping against hope for a negative reply.

"I am. She still hasn't seemed to have figured it out and I'm not sure how to bring this up."

"Tell me again what makes you so sure." Like Giles had already forgotten the explanation Reily had given him almost every week for the past month and a half. Reily sighed and repeated the speech again.

"I grew up on a farm. You learn how to tell when one of your animals is carrying. Her breasts are tender. Her abdomen is gravid. She hasn't touched the box of tampons under the sink in almost four months. She can't keep food down. She's over emotional and exhausted all the time. She wears next to nothing, insisting she is burning up, and it's 52 degrees outside. Not that bad in comparison to Iowa mind you, but still sufficient for long sleeves and a coat. She's wearing a scarf and shorts with sandals. Besides, I grew up on a farm. You learn how to tell when one of your animals is carrying. Not that I think of Buffy as my animal, but you know what I mean." Reily sat down on the couch and put his head in his hands. "This is all my fault. When Faith was Buffy and sheâ€¦ weâ€¦ I didn't think. It was so unexpected, I didn't think. The timing makes sense. We were really careful after that. Everytimeâ€¦ This is all my fault."

Giles looked down at the book in front of him. "No slayer has ever had any children. No slayer has lived as long as Buffy has. There is no precedent for this. You say she is bruising, getting weaker. We have no way of knowing if that is from lack of food and sleep or as a result of her condition. You need to tell her Reily, and then we need to get her to a doctor."

When Buffy woke up Reily was sitting in a chair in the corner across from the bed. His head was once again in his hands. Buffy smiled. "Good morning, my lover." When he didn't answer, she knew something was wrong.

"Buffy, we have to talk."

"Shoot."

Reily got up and sat down on the bed next to her. He took one of her hands. "Buffy, you know I love you right?" She nodded, puzzled. "We have been through a lot together, gotten through, the initiative, demons, vampires, sex, drugs, rock and roleâ€¦ and Faith." Buffy shuddered at the mention of that name. At the violation that girl had caused. Just the name evoked images of emotional rape to Buffy.

"Well, there is something else we are going to get through together. I believe in us Buffy and this is going to be okay."

"Reily, what is it? Are you sick? Is Mom okay? What is it, tell me!"

"Buffy, you're pregnant."

Buffy was screaming before Adam came crashing through the door.

Angel was not having a good day. LA was not Sunnydale, was not the Hellmouth, but there was something really wrong. There were way too many demons afoot. Cordelia had taken to bed with an endless barrage of horrible visions that were constantly plaguing her. His cell phone rang and he sighed before picking it up. "Where is it, Cordelia?" Wesley walked into the office his arms loaded with files.

"Tell her when this is over that I'm taking her out to dinner. Anywhere she wants. I had no idea just how much work she gets done around here."

Angel was already on his way out the door as he snapped the phone shut. "You're driving. This is bad."

"Oh Lord."

Cordelia opened the door before Angel could knock. "She hasn't stopped shivering sense she got here. I put her to bed, and she seems to be sleeping. She only stopped thrashing around and calling your name a few minutes ago."

Angel looked down on the fragile figure Buffy made under all the blankets. There were deep circles under her eyes and she was too thin, too delicate, even for Buffy. He reached down to push a stray hair away from her face. When he touched her, she sat up and screamed. Then she bolted for the bathroom. Cordelia, Wesley and Angel all stared at each other in shock as they listened to her dry heaves. Then they heard the faucet running.

"Don't worry, it's a lot worse than it looks and sounds." Buffy said weakly as she took the damp washcloth from her face and sat back down on the bed. Cordelia sat down next to her. Tenderness was not her thing, but she was trying.

"Are you okay?"

"Depends on your definitionâ€¦ by any definition, no."

Angel hadn't taken his eyes off her. There was something wrong, something different, something beautiful and something terrible about Buffy's face, all at the same time.

"Does Giles know you are here?" Wesley asked.

"Giles is dead." Buffy said softly. "They are all dead. Adam killed them all. Reily got in one last blow before he died. At least Adam's dead. But then so is everyone else. I couldn't stay there. I couldn't do it alone." She began to cry. "This is all my fault. Oh God, this is all my fault."

Cordelia looked up at Angel imploringly as Buffy shook with sobs beside her. Angel was still transfixed. Then he spoke.

"That's why we've had so many demons lately. No one is guarding the Hellmouth. How long ago, Buffy? How long have you been wondering?" There was still something more, and he dreaded it.

"About a month I think. I don't really know for sure. I wasn't gonna come here, burden you, involve you, but I couldn't stop myself. There was no place else to go."

"We'll take you back. Help out till you get back on your feet." Wesley said soothingly. "We can contact the Council, get you a new watcher. Assemble a new team. This is horrible, true, but we'll get it worked out." Cordelia rolled her eyes at him. That was the wrong thing to say. Typical male.

"There is more isn't there. Something else." Angel said.

"I'm pregnant."

Angel's world exploded.

The tea was helping. Buffy sat wrapped in the blankets clutching the teacup like a lifeline. She only hiccuped occasionally as she spoke.

"It was Faith. Not me. That's why I didn't suspect. I'm always so careful, I never even thought. But Reily knew. Cornfed Iowa Farmboy. He was afraid to tell me. So was Giles. This has never happened before. Giles assumed it was impossible. Sapped all my strength. Then Adam amassed an army to come kill us all. He died trying, but succeeded for the most part. Everyone in the initiative is dead. All my friends, my family, all of my team are dead. Without a leader the demons have overrun Sunnydale. I wasn't strong enough alone, pregnant to fight them. They figured it out and started coming after me, so I ran. Every vampire for a thousand miles was coming for me. Demons by the truck load. It's turned into an orgy of death down there and I couldn't stop it." She put her hand on her stomach. Even at four and a half months, there was barely a protrusion, just a tight firmness like a cramped muscle. "This is all I have left. I couldn't get rid of it. I didn't know where else to go, what else to do. This is such a huge mess and it's all my fault. I should have killed Faith in the beginning. We never should have let her live. I don't even know where she is." Buffy kept her eyes down. She didn't have the courage to look at Angel. She knew this hurt.

Wesley and Cordelia were looking at Angel. Neither liked what they saw. He heaved a big breath and stood up. "I'll go back to Sunnydale. Take care of business there. I still probably know some of the vampires there. With their help I can thin out the demons. By then the council can dispatch another Slayer to thin out the vampires. Meanwhile, you stay here. See a doctor and get healthy. I'll be back in a month. Wesley you're with me. I need you to call the council and then help give me back up. Cord, you keep the business up and stay out of trouble and the petty cash. Buffy can stay at my place and you can keep an eye on her. I suppose it's too much to hope Adam killed Spike too?"

Buffy laughed. "No he's still alive and impotent. He'll probably help if you ask him. He was really starting to get into the whole demon hunter thing."

"I'll see you in a month. Wes, I expect to see you in a couple days. I'll be at the mansion"

Buffy sighed. This had to be done, and this was as good a plan as

any. But she knew that Angel was running too.

Angel pulled the stake back toward himself as the vampire turned to dust. He turned to see Wesley wiping demon blood off his sword.

"I think that about does it." Wesley said as he put the blade back in its sheath. "LA will seem pretty tame after this, don't you think?"

Angel put the stake in his pocket and turned back toward home without saying anything. Wesley was right. The new Slayer was installed, and Sunnydale was under control. This was the last nest of Adam's cohorts and the new Slayer, Vicki was her name, and her Watcher, Jameson, could have handled this. Vicki had already made friends with several people who had a lot of Slayerette potential. Angel knew everything would be fine. It was time to go home to LA. Time to face Buffy.

Cordelia said she was fine. Now under a doctor's care she had pinked up, plumped up and Cordelia said once you got over the whole fat issue, she looked great for a six-month pregnant person. Pregnant, pregnant with another man's baby. He could never quite get passed that part. He had left because he wanted that for her. A normal life, with a normal husband and children, a house full of them. But these things were not normal. No normal life a dead non-husband and just this baby that Buffy didn't even get to conceive herself. Angel knew Buffy needed him, and God help him, he would be there, but he'd rather be staked in the heart, go back to hell or watch Cordelia act. All three options sounded better than facing Buffy again.

Cordelia was in the office, her feet up, reading Cosmopolitan and filling out some personality quiz when Angel walked through the door.

"Angel!" Her feet hit the ground with a crash. "Angel, how are you?"

"Fine Cordelia, ready to get back to work. Why don't you bring me all the possible cases." He said as he walked into his office and stopped dead. Buffy was sitting at his desk. She stared at him over the files spread across the desk.

"Angel! You are back!"

"Could be wrong here Buffy, but shouldn't you be downstairs with your feet up, eating pickles and ice-cream and knitting booties?"

"Yeah, well that got old. And I didn't want you to lose business soâ€¦"

Angel rolled his eyes and dropped into the chair before the desk, "so you decided to go demon hunting in your condition. Gile's ghost is going to kill me." He reached up and pinched his lower lip in concentration. Then he smiled. "So what have you gotten done?"

Buffy smiled back. "I know you are mad, but I feel so much better and I am getting plenty of rest and eating good and all and I just couldn't take it anymore. I swear I'm not doing anything really dangerous, just the smaller stuff. Really."

Cordelia walked in to the office with a glass of milk as a vitamin. She set them on the desk before Buffy briskly and crossed her arms. "That's not completely true, but there doesn't seem to be much of anything anyone can do about it." She tapped her foot. Buffy rolled her eyes, sighed and took the pill downing the milk in one gulp. She belched loudly and giggled.

Angel gave Cordelia a look and she left quickly, closing the door behind her. Then he turned back to Buffy. Buffy took a deep breath and said what he was about to ask.

"Yes I loved him. Not like you, but so help me I loved him. I would have married him if he'd asked and I am happy to be having his baby for whatever else hell breaks lose. You would have liked him I think. He was nothing and everything like you. He won't mind if his daughter calls you Daddy. He won't mind that you are my best friend and business partner."

"You sure that's such a good idea? We tried this before, remember?"

Buffy nodded. "But things are different now. I can't do this alone, Angel. And you are all I have left. Besides I'm not a reckless kid anymore." She stood and placed her hand against her thickened waist (Angel made a mental note to tell Cordelia that Buffy was not fat even by pregnant standards, but she was cute.) "I'm gonna be a mother and I need help. I need to know that there is someone to help me protect this child," she paused and added softly, "Reily's child," then her voice got stronger, "And you are the best man for the job. Life can't be any harder together than it was when we were apart. We'll deal with whatever when it happens." She struck out her hand, "Partners?"

Angel stepped forward and grasped her hand. The other he laid over the swell of her child. The baby moved under his hand and he smiled.

"Partners."

End
file.